TL5628

SOME PRINCIPLES FOR EVALUATING THE RESPONSE OF THE RC CHURCH IN INDONESIA TO NATIONAL POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS 1907-1997

This period has seen the achievement of national independence, the incorporation of the territory of West New Guinea into the Republic of Indonesia, and the invasion and occupation of Portuguese Timor. Inevitably the Catholic Church in Indonesia has been involved in these successive events. It has endeavoured to carry out its ministry in a developing and often turbulent political situation. This evaluation of the Church's conduct tries to take into account the understanding which the Church has of its particular mission in human history.

The Church perceives two principle dimensions to its activity - its role as Pastor, and as Prophet. While these responsibilities can be distinguished from each other, in practice they overlap and generate one another. They require the Church to be engaged in matters of social welfare and security. The Church is also concerned to preserve its freedom to proclaim its message and carry out its work. Thus it is that the Church becomes embroiled in political affairs: so that it can survive to serve the people. However, the Church is called to put its trust in the Gospel it claims to live by, relying only on the power of God to uphold its ministry and effect its mission.

The role of **Pastor** is primarily a spiritual one. It is to share in the 'redeeming work' of Christ who leads humanity from a situation of sin to one of grace, from sickness to health, from death to life, from time into eternity. The Church's purpose is to bring about in the human family an increasing orientation towards and participation in the life and love of God. This properly includes the improvement of present human circumstances but it is not limited to any historical project, however worthy. The Church's intention must always be to promote 'integral' human development. This includes spiritual health as well as material well being, and looks beyond the present experience, however significant, to a future which is expected to transcend it..

The Church carries out its role as **Prophet** in the first instance by continually recalling the faithful to true Christian discipleship and to the wholehearted observance of their religious duties with a view to their ultimate destiny. The Church does not have a political message or purpose and should avoid political partisanship. But it is a participant in human social affairs and is itself a society with political significance. Furthermore the Gospel values by which it tries to live mandate the Church to do all it can to defend human dignity and promote human development. So the Church is duty bound to comment objectively and dispassionately on the prevailing situation. It should point the way things are going and to the implications for human welfare both in the present and for the future. The exercise of this prophetical ministry may require the Church to criticise, or challenge; to seek to restrain some kinds of activity in the body politic - or to encourage others. Inevitably this will evoke a reaction from the secular authority. It will thereby reveal both the strength and the vulnerability of the Church in society. Thus the prophetical role has to be carried out judiciously - with courage, prudence, and sensitivity - if it is to bear positive fruit.

Because the Church identifies with all efforts to enhance human welfare it will become a partner in 'nation-building' if this leads to a bettering of the conditions in which people live, an increase in the opportunities offered to them for personal and social development, and an improvement in the quality and extent of their mutual service. It should not go along with the pursuit of national ambitions which disadvantage or imperil other human communities. It should not become a mere instrument of secular policy, although those in political power frequently attempt such an enlistment. It should be watchful lest actions in its own self-defence cause or contribute to the sufferings of others.

Participating in the unfolding history of twentieth-century Indonesia the local Catholic Church has sought to fulfil its two-fold responsibility as Pastor and Prophet. Briefly scanning that history this paper invites comment upon the relative success or failure of the Church in measuring up to its own criteria for action.

Situated in a pluralist but predominantly Muslim society the Church in Indonesia has always felt insecure. When the first significant nationalist movement *Budi Utomo*, 'Noble Endeavour', was inaugurated in 1908 its advocacy of religious tolerance at first seemed attractive to the Church. But before long the movement's 'neutral' stance regarding religion was felt to be an inadequate safeguard of Catholic interests. Thus the Provisional Catholic Committee for Political Action was formed which led in turn to the foundation of the *IKP (Indische Katholicke Partij),* Catholic Party for the Indies. These initial responses within the Church to political developments were evidently concerned with its protection. But they cannot be reduced to the self-defensive action of a particular small group within society. Their aim was to maintain the Church's freedom to proclaim its Gospel in worship and word, and to enable the continuation of its valuable social welfare work.

In 1918 a 'Revision Committee' was formed by the Dutch colonial authorities to advise on a new form of local Government which would safeguard the rights of the native people and bestow upon them more administrative power. A respected missionary, Fr.van Lith, was appointed as Catholic representative. He rejected any form of Government in which the Dutch continued to pull the strings. He argued that this would fail to serve the people's welfare and would ultimately be detrimental to the Dutch as well. He was in no doubt about the stance the Church should take if there were to be a conflict of interests:

Everybody knows that ... we wish to act as mediators... but if it should come to a split so that we are compelled to take sides we shall take the sides of the natives... Religion has inspired us with the highest ideal, which urges us to work as brothers for the freedom, the growth, the prosperity of Java in the Indies.

It was not long before another Catholic political organisation came into being - the *PPKD (Perkumpulan Politik Katolik di Djawa),* The Catholic Political Association of Java. It had a deliberately vague formulation of its intent - 'to co-operate in the development and progress of the country'. This afforded it freedom to organise and to have a seat on the Colonial Governor's Advisory Council, the *Volksraad.* By 1932 one of its most outstanding leaders, I.J.Kasimo, claimed the support of Catholic political and social doctrine when he declared that 'the Netherlands had a duty to grant self-determination and finally self-government to the Indonesian national community'. Later renamed the *PPKI (Persatuan Politik Katolik Indonesia),* Political Association of Indonesian Catholics, this organisation carefully refrained from formally pronouncing against the Dutch. Thus it was allowed to continue its activities when other groups who advocated complete political independence were suppressed.

Van Lith's and Kasimo's advocacy of Indonesian rights and interests gained the attention of nationalist leaders, notably Sukarno. They also valued the extensive social work organised by the Church in its pastoral ministry - especially its high quality educational provision, its commitment to health care, and its welfare assistance of the poor.

The period 1945-50 between the Proclamation of Independence and the establishment of the Republic of Indonesia was one of considerable turbulence. Sukarno was prevailed upon to abandon the one-party model he had envisaged in the Proclamation Constitution and to allow a political system in the style of Western democracies. This gave rise to numerous conflicting groups. During this time the Church played a significant role in the task of the building up the nation, both politically and socially.

The ideology of *Pancasila* was approved because it its principles were considered to be at least consistent with the Christian Gospel, and also because they seemed to safeguard the continuation of the Church's presence and ministry.

The Manifesto of the newly formed *PKRI (Partai Katolik Republik Indonesia)* declared 'a will to defend the Republic and strengthen its condition...to preserve the unity of the people as necessary for progress and self-sufficiency'.

Bishop Sugyapranata, as Apostolic Vicar the leading Catholic clergyman, called on the faithful to give the young Republic their support and co-operation.

Many Catholic students volunteered to take up arms in the struggle against Dutch colonial rule - and were to lose their lives in doing so.

After Independence was achieved all the existing Catholic parties which had come into existence across the archipelago were merged into one, the *PK (Partai Katolik).* This took place at the first congress of any to be held in the new Republic at national level. The statutes of the Catholic Party declared that the bases of its operations were 'belief in God, Catholic Social Doctrine, and *Pancasila'*, and that its objective was 'to work for the progress of the Republic of Indonesia and the welfare of its people'. Such identification with the aspirations of the young nation state brought favourable regard on the part of the secular authorities. But it should be noted also that the *PK* carried out a unique policy - people of all races and descents were allowed to become members of the Party as long as they were Indonesian citizens. Such inclusiveness indicates that the Gospel precepts remained its ideology.

During the years 1950-59, as the period of so-called 'Liberal Democracy' continued the influence of the Catholic Church was greater than could be expected from the size of its membership. Its educational provision had ensured that Catholics were numerous among the administrative class and therefore prominent partners with the Government in the practicalities of nation-building. The hierarchy encouraged the fullest participation of Catholics in political and social life. However, the Bishops were not uncritical of developments that were taking place. They adopted a neutral position in respect of the political system as such and gave their approval to the inclusion of a number of priests in the Cabinet and in the *MPRS (Majelis Permusyawaratan Rakyat (Sementara),* (Provisional) People's Consultative Assembly. But the growing assertiveness and influence of the Communist Party caused them and the Catholic Party leadership considerable alarm. They spoke of Communism as a form of 'neo-colonialism' and a 'destructive force' . They also warned of the dangers of Capitalist exploitation, and of nationalism itself becoming a kind of religion. In such objective commentaries the Church leadership was expressing its prophetical ministry. Meanwhile the ongoing pastoral care exercised by the Church at large for those with various human needs demonstrated an obedience to the mandate of Jesus to 'love all persons as I have loved you'.

In 1963 the United Nations, strongly influenced by the Government of the United States, gave approval to Indonesia taking control of West New Guinea. In fact the incorporation of this territory had been on the agenda of the *PK* from its inception and it had endeavoured to bring its influence to bear upon the outcome of deliberations. Bishop Sugyapranata also encouraged such a development. The general position of the Catholic Church regarding the political status of particular territories is to accept the decision of the UN, but its leadership in Indonesia were hardly non-partisan in this instance. In a special Pastoral Letter the local hierarchy formally acknowledged as a legitimate political development the take-over of the region in which they served. They professed confidence in the just ordering of the country's affairs under Indonesian authority. Although the Letter did call upon the Government to have an eye 'for the special character and needs of the country and its peoples', the rights of the native Papuans were not defended by the Church as formerly had been those of the Indonesians against the Dutch. At least 100,000 indigenous people have lost their lives as Indonesian sovereignty has been imposed by the 'Security Forces' of the Republic, and the struggle for the political independence of their countrymen by the *OPM (Organisasi Papua Merdeka),* Free Papua Movement, still persists. Evidently the Bishops' assessment of the situation was mistaken.

But in the matter of having due respect for the dignity of the original inhabitants of the territory the Church itself has consistently given a good example. Its 'integrated pastoral programme' has been admirably respectful of local cultures while providing education, health care, and in various practical ways offering help to the different tribes to cope positively with the new circumstances into which they have been thrust. The Church has also been to the forefront of efforts to defend them from exploitation and abuse by agencies of government or commerce, and it undertakes substantial welfare work on behalf of all those now living in the region, both native and migrant. Besides these very practical expressions of its pastoral and prophetical ministry the Church in *'Irian Jaya'* has been unfailingly committed to its religious mission in what are difficult and demanding circumstances.

In September 1965 six generals and a lieutenant of the Indonesian armed forces were murdered in the environs of Jakarta. There are various accounts and interpretations of this puzzling event. Whatever the truth of the matter may be there is no doubt that the incident provided Major General Suharto with the opportunity to take political control. The Communist party was accused of attempting a coup and a bloody suppression took place involving the murder or imprisonment of all its supposed sympathisers. At least half a million people were to perish.

The Catholic bishops were out of the country attending the Second Vatican Council at the time of the alleged 'coup', but on their return they published a letter addressed 'To our Fellow Countrymen' in which they expressed their distress at 'the many victims' and asked pardon for 'any negligence or irresponsibility of theirs' which might have contributed to the disaster. They called for the principles of *Pancasila* to be honoured as offering a good basis for a tolerant and inclusive society. It is evident that the hierarchy had misgivings about the manner in which the *Orde Baru*, New Order, Government was being established, but that they were relieved by its opposition to Communism and its control of Islamist assertion. They also supported its proposed 'Development' programme which seemed to offer remedy for the nation's serious economic and social ills.

The Catholic Party, however, was quite open about its participation in the destruction of the *PKI*, and about its backing for Suharto and what it regarded as 'a return to the Rule of Law, and a clear and consistent adherence to the *Pancasila* and the 1945 Constitution'.

Clearly both the Bishops and the Catholic politicians considered that the developments which had taken place would be to the advantage of the Church, safeguarding its place in and its mission to Indonesian society through its various institutions.

Subsequently both the politicians and the Bishops have had cause to ponder the wisdom of their judgement. The dissolution of all the existing parties in the amalgamation required by the *Orde Baru* in 1973 had a very negative effect upon Catholic influence in national affairs. The laws introduced in 1978, 1984 and 1988 prohibiting proselytism and foreign funding, and proscribing the activities of foreign missionaries brought the hierarchy into a heightened sense of the continuing vulnerability of the Church in Indonesia. Subsequently the growing influence of the Muslim majority upon national politics and social relations have made many in the Catholic community feel still more insecure. It seems very necessary for the Church to adopt a co-operative rather than a confrontational relationship with the government it is to remain free and able to undertake its primary religious task, sustain its wide-ranging pastoral care (particularly its educational institutions and public health provision) and retain some influence in the development of the nation in accordance with Gospel principles.

Therefore the Bishops have taken pains to emphasise the spiritual purposes of the Church, its desire for social tolerance and harmony, its promotion of humanitarian values, and its desire to contribute to the up-building of the nation. They have avoided explicit political directives, eschewed political partisanship, and warned against the politicisation of religion. But they have invited Catholics, and Indonesian citizens in general - and the Government in particular - to consider the wisdom of some of the regime's policies and to reflect on the state of the nation. The Church has continued to grow numerically, in its pastoral institutions and activity, and in its indigenous leadership. These are significant gains which the Church is anxious not to jeopardise.

It is in such a context that the response of the Catholic Church in Indonesia to the situation of East Timor must be judged.

The Indonesian Church has consistently expressed a desire for a just and peaceful settlement of the persisting conflict within and in respect of East Timor. It has been involved in the pastoral care of the East Timorese people since 'Integration' was formally declared in mid 1976. At that time this care included attending to the needs of the many refugees in the neighbouring Dioceses of West Timor, especially Atambua, and it was also effected through the supply of material aid and the deployment of Church personnel to serve in the territory itself - a practice which continues to the present day. Humanitarian relief has been generated in the Church throughout Indonesia, and also evoked by the Indonesian Church from Catholic relief agencies in other countries. The training of East Timorese students for the priesthood and of lay assistants is offered at ecclesiastical institutions in Indonesia.

However, the Indonesian pastors do not enjoy the complete confidence of the East Timorese faithful. They are perceived as agents of Government policy, as partners in the assertion of Indonesian sovereignty, as co-operators in the building of the Republic on Timorese soil. Such a perception has been encouraged by the proposals made by the Indonesian hierarchy and leading Catholic laity to the Vatican that the Diocese of Dili should belong to the Indonesian Bishops Conference. It has also been fostered by the deployment of influential Indonesian Church personnel as 'bridge-builders' between the Timorese Church and the Indonesian Authorities, and by President Suharto's direct appeal (in 1994) to the Bishops to help 'solve the problem of East Timor'.

Generally, however, the Church in Indonesia has avoided becoming involved in the issue of East Timor's political status. There are several reasons for this much criticised posture.

One reason is that the Church in Indonesia has not been as informed about the situation in East Timor as is desirable. This is due to the isolation of the territory brought about by the Indonesian occupation, and to the control of information exercised by the present government and its agencies. Thus the perception of many in the Church aligns with the view of the secular authorities and so is at variance with the opinion of those East Timorese who are not in thrall to the present regime. In particular there is the widely held notion that East Timorese efforts towards independent nationhood - or even local autonomy - are the activity of a 'small minority' of 'political separatists'.

Another reason is to be discovered in the Church's traditional opposition to Communism. Besides the ideological conflict between Catholicism and Marxism perceived by the institutional Church as a whole, the Indonesian Church leadership has special cause to be concerned about any possible Communist assertion. The Government's intimation of 'communist insurgence' in East Timor recalls the horrors of the 1965 blood bath, and stirs anxiety among hierarchy and faithful - as it does in the population at large. Conscious of the importance of the support of Western powers for much-needed Indonesian economic and social development the Bishops have also been concerned not to infer any sympathy on their part for the alleged agents of left-wing political assertion.

Then there are cultural reasons such as the Javanese deference to authority and the traditional manner of resolving disputes through a process of *Musyawara-Mufakat,* consultation and consensus'. It is considered proper that criticisms should not be aired publicly but presented via an ascending scale of Government representatives, civil or military. Anxious to be integrated in local culture the Church has fallen in with this 'Indonesian way' of conducting public affairs.

The Catholic community played a significant part in the achievement of Indonesian political independence, and its members take a pride in their national identity and in the ideals and purposes of the Republic. They are always conscious, as every Indonesian is, of the fragility of the union between the disparate groups of people who inhabit the sprawling archipelago. Consequently they are anxious about any political movement which seems to threaten its disruption. Antipathy within East Timor to an Indonesian vision of political unity is regarded as a menace to national stability, a sickness that could spread to other 'disaffected groups' and so threaten the welfare of the nation as a whole. The Government's presentation of the situation in East Timor has done nothing to dispel such concerns, and much to encourage them.

There are also 'ecclesial' reasons. For example, the theological view that in the context of Indonesian society the 'ministry of prophecy' should be exercised via an ecclesiastical equivalent of the *Musyawara-Mufakat* process not by outspoken individuals, or even by the Bishops Conference. It is questionable whether any criticism of the Government's policy in respect of East Timor by the Bishops would enjoy the complete support of the Catholic laity most of whom are concerned for their own security in economic and social affairs. Also, apart from appealing to the very general principles of *Pancasila* or to the traditional ideal of *Gotong Royong*, Mutual Help, there is little in the way of published Government intentions to which Catholics critics could appeal for theoretical support. Of course, there is also the view that the concern of the Church should be its religious task, not the resolution of issues which are essentially political.

Finally, there is the purely practical consideration as to whether adverse comment in respect of Government policy over East Timor would actually have any effect, other than a negative one. There is always the risk that public criticism of the Government would result in the curtailment of the assistance which the Catholic community in Indonesia is able to offer the Church and people of East Timor.

Nonetheless, the hierarchy have recently been unanimous in their recommendation that the presence of Indonesian troops in East Timor be reduced, or even withdrawn altogether. The Bishops have given emphasis to the importance of 'heeding the real aspirations of the East Timorese' and creating 'a social milieu in which the people of East Timor feel that their cultural, religious, and historical identity is recognised and safeguarded'. In their 1997 Lenten Pastoral Letter the Bishops declared 'it is our fervent hope that all parties concerned make a profound introspection and ask why, after twenty years of Integration some East Timorese have yet to live it'.

Cardinal Darmaatmadja has also publicly criticised the 'Security Approach' used by the authorities in East Timor noting that it has signally 'failed to reduce tensions (or) address underlying problems'. He has called for 'an open dialogue' inclusive or all East Timorese opinion, so that a resolution might be found and 'lest the young generation in East Timor inherit only hate'.

Lately, a strikingly direct criticism of the regime's policy in East Timor has been contributed by other well-regarded leaders in the Indonesian Church.

To conclude it is appropriate to attempt a brief evaluation of the Indonesian Church's response to national political developments using the principles delineated at the beginning of this paper.

The pastoral work of the Church is wide-ranging and has grown in extent and effectiveness. It has responded to the various and formidable challenges presented, and it has addressed the integral welfare of all people in Indonesian society in respect of both their present and future needs, in this world or beyond it.

The Church in Indonesia has played a significant role in the building of the nation, and continues to do so. There have been entirely admirable features of that engagement, but also there has been some identification with secular national ambitions, and a degree of partisanship on some political issues. The attitude of the Church towards Indonesian progress can be contrasted strikingly with its response to the aspirations of the Papuan peoples of West New Guinea, and to those of the East Timorese. The motivation in these instances has primarily been the desire for the Church's work to continue uninhibited. But this cannot justify participation in the perpetration of injustice, albeit unwitting.

The role of Prophet is essential to a living and dynamic Church, but it can be difficult to discern how to exercise that ministry effectively and fruitfully. The many institutions established by the Church in Indonesia, and the devoted care courageously and consistently offered by Church personnel to the needy in difficult and dangerous circumstances is a continual and impressive witness to the values of the Gospel and to the love of God for humanity. Working within the cultural norms is clearly appropriate and effective. In present day Indonesian society a confrontational posture is of doubtful merit. Nonetheless, the question once asked by an Indonesian Jesuit priest in respect of the Church's response to East Timor is still pertinent:

The decision we make - to speak out or not to speak - will determine in large measure what we will be as a Church. Are we another bloc in society seeking prosperity and influence, or are we a religious community led by the Gospel? Right'now we've got them mixed up.

There are many in the Church today who are critical of what they see as 'the defence of the institution, the neglect of justice'. Is the Church willing to emulate its founder and take the risk of sacrificing its corporate life for the sake of the Kingdom of God?

000

P.A.Smythe
10.7.97.